



## CALHOUN COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

190 E. Michigan Avenue, Ste. A100 Phone: (269) 969-6370  
Battle Creek, Michigan 49014 Fax: (269) 966-1489

*December 13, 2011*

# Tis' the Season to Recycle

*Paul Makoski, Environmental Health Manager*

Are you looking for more ways to recycle? Are you looking for ways to continue protecting the air, water, and soil around us?

The Calhoun County Public Health Department will accept CFL's (compact fluorescent lightbulbs); household size batteries and "sharps" waste (syringes and needles) for recycling and disposal. When these items are incorrectly disposed of, they can create a health and safety risk by contaminating our homes and the air, water, and soil around us.

These items may be brought into the health department in Battle Creek (Toeller Building, 190 East Michigan Avenue) during normal operating hours; 8 a.m. - 12 noon or 1 p.m. – 4 p.m. Household size batteries and unbroken CFL bulbs should be taken to the environmental health office. Sharps materials that are in an acceptable sharps container will be accepted in the clinic office.

Using CFL's is a great way to save energy and money and lessen the creation of undesirable greenhouse gases. Compact fluorescent lights use 75% less energy than a comparable wattage incandescent bulb plus it lasts 10 times as long and is much less expensive. There is, however, a very small amount of mercury within the bulb which is why recycling is important. Recycling is important not only because it keeps mercury out of our environment but allows the mercury to be recovered and reused.

If you break a fluorescent bulb, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recommends that you follow these steps for clean-up.

### **CLEANUP AND DISPOSAL OVERVIEW**

The most important steps to reduce exposure to mercury vapor from a broken bulb are:

1. Before cleanup
  - a. Have people and pets leave the room.
  - b. Air out the room for 5-10 minutes by opening a window or door to the outdoor environment.
  - c. Shut off the central forced air heating/air conditioning (H&AC) system, if you have one.
  - d. Collect materials needed to clean up broken bulb. Clean up materials include:
    - Stiff paper or cardboard to act as a dust pan
    - Sticky tape (duct tape works well)
    - Damp paper towels or disposable wet wipes (for hard surfaces)
    - A sealable plastic bag or container
    - Do not vacuum
2. During cleanup
  - a. Be thorough in collecting broken glass and visible powder.
  - b. Place cleanup materials in a sealable container.
3. After cleanup
  - a. Promptly place all bulb debris and cleanup materials outdoors in a trash container or protected area until materials can be disposed of properly. Avoid leaving any bulb fragments or cleanup materials indoors.
  - b. For several hours, continue to air out the room where the bulb was broken and leave the H&AC system shut off.

Since 1993 domestically produced alkaline and carbon zinc batteries have been essentially mercury-free, however they still need to be properly recycled. Other battery types do still contain mercury. Even though household batteries constitute a relatively small volume of our solid waste stream (over 6,000,000 are sold each year), they are still a concentrated source for some heavy metals of concern to human and environmental health such as cadmium, mercury, and lead. The use of rechargeable batteries helps to lessen the problem provided that they are properly recycled when their useful life is over.

#### **BATTERY CARE AND USE**

To extend the useful life of your batteries follow these useful tips:

1. Clean dirty battery contact surfaces by rubbing them with a clean pencil eraser or cloth.
2. When completed replace all batteries with the proper type.
3. Preserve battery life by removing the batteries from a device that will not be used for an extended time. Store them in a cool, dry place.
4. Charge your rechargeable batteries at room temperature (68-72 degrees F) to extend battery life.
5. Remember to charge your rechargeable batteries a few hours before use since they lose about 1% of their deliverable energy each day when left off the charger.

There are many important reasons for the proper disposal of sharps materials. The main reason is the potential for this waste to spread bloodborne pathogens such as hepatitis A, hepatitis B, typhus, tuberculosis, diphtheria, herpes, syphilis, gonorrhea, and HIV. It is estimated that over 500,000 accidental needle sticks occur each year in the United States. The public can be at direct risk from these items even if they are not contaminated with biohazardous material. They are SHARP. If these materials are not separated from the general waste stream, individuals can unknowingly come in contact with them. In addition if these items are not properly disposed of and removed from the waste stream then they can be subject to reuse (both intentional and non-intentional). This is particularly true of needles and syringes.

For further information concerning the Calhoun County Public Health Department's recycling and household hazardous collection please contact our office at 269-969-6341.